

Report to Cottenham Parish Council
For October/November 2008 from
Nigel Bolitho

The past month has been a quiet period for me - apart from the weather.

Shadow Board

Much of my “councillor” time has been taken up on matters to do with the Shadow Housing Board. A new housing association, South Cambridgeshire Village Homes, has been formally set up to take over SCDC’s housing stock if the tenants of nearly 6,000 council homes agree in a ballot probably early in 2009. The measure to take such action sneaked through the September SCDC council meeting and will be debated again on 27 November, Thanksgiving. The next move is to nominate the “chair” and “vice chair” of the organisation and they have to be tenant or independent representatives. I must say I am particularly impressed by the independent (business)

representatives who have been recruited. The highlight of the month! was a day-long bonding session at Madingley Hall where we were encouraged “to express ourselves”. In cosy groups of four we were given various tasks and one I was asked about is where the new housing association (if it is set up) should be in 5 years time. I rather liked that one because in economic terms I reckon:-

- house prices will be 10% lower than now after falling at least 20% to 40% from summer 2007 peak levels;
- Bank Base rate will be back to 4% or more after falling to 2-2.5% next year as falling interest rates aimed at trying to ward off a severe recession are followed by rising rates to try to ward off a sharp increase in inflation.

In these circumstances there is a window of opportunity for a new housing association (in conjunction with partners) to acquire land and even part-completed properties quite cheaply. The new international accounting rules which

have forced banks to devalue investments to market value also means that listed house-builders are having to reduce the value of their land banks and a lot of land will soon be up for sale because many of those house-builders need to sell to pay down heavy debts and avoid breaching banking covenants.

If a new housing association is set up, I hope it will be keen to add to its housing stock to help house some of the 4,000 on SCDC's housing waiting list. On the basis of the information available, I don't think SCDC will be in a financial position to undertake any purchases of any land holdings of any sort.

Orchard Close

As councillors may be aware, Kelsey/Dominion Housing Association has finally withdrawn its planning application for 13 dwellings on this site north of Orchard Close and to the rear of Rampton Road. Then a day later SCDC informed me that Hundred Houses Society has

put in a planning application for 12 dwellings. I note that “detailed discussions” have taken place with CPC and local residents. What I also note is that:-

- there is no information given about the type of resident for the affordable housing. At the last planning meeting on this subject, a Liberal member for Milton made the good point that this area is an area of peace and quiet for elderly residents. Injecting families with children racing around will dramatically change that situation. The developer also seems to think he can simply connect 12 houses to the sewer running under Orchard Close. A review of the previous application made it clear that the sewer is incapable of servicing existing houses, let alone new ones.

Unit J

I have had no comments back from Mr Richard Greer regarding a breakdown of Arup’s £10,000 + Vat costs. I note, however, that Mr Koch or

other SCDC employees are taking regular noise readings at the site.